Met Office celebrates 150 years of forecasting for the Nation

Description

Monday 1st of August 2011 is a very special day for the Met Office. We will be celebrating 150 years of forecasting for the nation, marking the anniversary of the first ever public weather forecast appearing in print.

Starting with the lines “general weather probable in the next two days”, the short piece which appeared in on page 10 of the The Times in 1861 was a bold move which started forecasting as we know it today.

It was put together by Robert FitzRoy, a captain in the Royal Navy and a pioneer in the field of meteorology who headed up the department which later became the Met Office.

John Hirst, Chief Executive of the Met Office, said: “We’re extremely proud of our long heritage and to be marking this landmark anniversary of forecasting for the nation.

“Ever since our humble beginnings, the Met Office has been a pioneer in the science of meteorology. Forecasting the very variable British weather is always testing but by facing that test every day we have established a reputation around the world as being amongst the very best at what we do.

“Most of all, we’re proud to have stayed true to our origins by forecasting what the weather has in store to help safeguard lives and property.”

The inspiration for FitzRoy’s first forecast came from the desire to protect life and property. In 1859 a storm wrecked the ship Royal Charter and many others, costing the lives of hundreds of people.

He believed this kind of event could be forecast in advance – giving people the necessary time to prepare. This belief led to his first public forecast in 1861.

THE WEATHER.

METEOROLOGICAL REPORTS.

Wednesday, July 27, 9 to 9 a.m.	B.	E.	M.	D.	F.	C.	I.	S.
Malin	29·94	57	52	W.S.W.	6	9	o.	2
Aberdeen	29·93	59	54	S.S.W.	3	7	b.	3
Leith	29·90	61	55	W.	3	3	c.	1
Sunrise	29·89	59	55	W.S.W.	4	4	c.	2
Arbroath	29·78	57	55	W.	3	4	c.	3
Portrush	29·79	57	54	S.W.	2	3	b.	2
Shields	29·90	59	54	W.S.W.	4	5	o.	2
Galway	29·92	65	62	W.	3	4	c.	4
Scarborough ..	29·95	59	56	W.	3	6	c.	1
Liverpool	29·91	61	56	S.W.	2	3	c.	2
Valentia	29·97	63	60	S.W.	2	3	o.	3
Queenstown ..	29·96	61	59	W.	3	3	c.	2
Yarmouth	30·05	61	59	W.	3	3	c.	2
London	30·02	62	56	S.W.	3	2	b.	—
Dover	30·04	70	61	S.W.	3	7	o.	3
Portsmouth ..	30·04	62	59	W.	3	6	o.	1
Portland	30·03	62	59	S.W.	2	2	o.	2
Plymouth	30·00	62	59	W.	5	1	b.	4
Penzance	30·04	61	60	S.W.	2	6	o.	3
Copenhagen ..	29·94	66	—	W.S.W.	2	6	c.	2
Helder	29·99	65	—	W.S.W.	6	5	o.	2
Brest	30·09	69	—	S.W.	2	6	c.	1
Bayonne	30·13	68	—	—	—	9	m.	1
Lisbon	30·13	70	—	N.N.W.	4	3	b.	2

General weather probable during next two days in the—
North—Moderate westerly wind; fine.
West—Moderate south-westerly; fine.
South—Fresh westerly; fair.

Explanation.

The first daily weather forecast, The Times, 1 Aug 1861 (Click to enlarge)

Since then forecasting has stayed at the forefront of scientific and technical development, embracing advances such as chaos theory, supercomputers, satellites, and even mobile internet to transform the way forecasts are created and delivered.

During that time forecasts have had a huge impact – from advising of a weather window for the D-Day landings to giving advance warning of the terrible floods in Cumbria in November 2009.

To mark the event, the Met Office is launching a photo competition asking the public to put forward pictures which define weather moments of 2011 so far. Details of the competition, as well as a timeline of major events in forecasting over the last 15 decades, are on the Met Office website or you can find out more about our history as well.

Date Created
July 2011

Met Office in the Media: 29 July 2011

Description

There have been a lot of news reports today (Express, Mirror, Telegraph) about the spell of **fine weather** we are seeing at the moment in contrast to the rather disappointing weather we had seen earlier in July. The fine weather looks set for the weekend and into the middle of the coming week. As the Met Office forecast the first week of school holidays in England and Wales has seen some fine weather for most areas of the UK at some point through this week.

The Met Office provides a range of forecasts for the public on our website, on mobile phones and through our website widgets, allowing you to stay right up to date with the latest weather. Since last summer the Met Office has launched local forecasts for up to 5000 locations across the UK, including seaside resorts and tourist attractions across the country. These regularly updated forecasts provide local detail on the weather to help you plan your day out with confidence.

Mark Smith, Director of Bournemouth Tourism said: “These new forecasts from the Met Office communicate weather forecast information in clearer, more appropriate and user friendly ways that allow tourists and tourism operators to better plan activities. As weather is a key driver for tourists, I am sure that this improved communication will have a positive economic impact on our industry and will improve the overall quality of life for British residents through more productive use of their leisure time.”

Several papers also reported on soul star **Beverley Knight’s weather obsession**. The Mail on Sunday and The Telegraph reported how Ms Knight had been in contact with experts here at the Met Office to find out what the typical weather may be on a range of dates for her upcoming wedding. The Met Office was happy to help and we wish her and her fiance well with their ongoing wedding plans.

Finally, BBC online and New Scientist have reported on how the University of East Anglia have **released nearly all its remaining data** on temperature measurements with the help of the Met Office. All data sent to the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia by National Meteorological Services around the globe to complete its global land temperature dataset CRUTEM3 has been released, apart from data from 19 stations in Poland.

Date Created
July 2011

Biodiversity award for the Met Office

Description

The Met Office has become one of only a handful of organisations to achieve a prestigious benchmark for protecting and promoting biodiversity at its Exeter HQ.

From creating wildflower meadows to introducing bee hives, the award marks years of work to integrate wildlife and environmental considerations into the day to day operations of the Exeter site.

The Wildlife Trusts has recognised that by awarding the Met Office its Biodiversity Benchmark Award. Only 15 organisations and 40 sites in the UK have met this rigorous standard so far and the Met Office is the first from the public sector.

Neal Pearce, Environmental Advisor, at the Met Office said: “This standard is very tough to both achieve and maintain, as it requires sites to be environmentally managed to the highest of levels. This award reflects the commitment of the Met Office to minimise our impact upon the environment, whilst endeavouring to promote and actively enhance the biodiversity performance from our sites.”

The work to get the Benchmark follows on from work of volunteer members of staff at the Exeter site who helped create its first wildflower meadow. These habitats have been in decline for decades but are important for supporting many species of wildlife.

Initially the area designated as a wildflower meadow covered three quarters of an acre, but this has now been extended to three acres.

Additional habitats have been identified across the site to encourage a wide range of wildlife, for example bee hives have been added, and nesting boxes for swifts and bats are being investigated as part of a regional project, supported by the Devon Wildlife Trust.

The range of work has already had a positive impact, with observations suggesting significantly more diversity of species noted on the site, including the rare ‘Maiden Pink’ wild flower, classified as a nationally scarce species.

Peter Dorans, Corporate Relations Manager for The Wildlife Trusts, said “I am delighted that the Met Office has achieved Biodiversity Benchmark on its Head Office site. It demonstrates that, even on a site used primarily as office accommodation, with careful and committed management wildlife can flourish.

“Like other public sector organisations the Met Office, both as a landholder and a part of the community in which it operates, has a major role to play in the realisation of our vision of A Living Landscape. Achievement of Biodiversity Benchmark is a major challenge and demonstrates the Met Office’s commitment to playing its part in the restoration of the natural world.”

Date Created
July 2011

Dangerous Heat Wave Continues Across Much of Central and Eastern US

Description

The United States National Weather Service has said that the dangerous heat wave that has lead to a number of deaths is expected to continue across much of the central and eastern United States, with excessive heat and humidity expanding into the Ohio Valley and East Coast states for the remainder of the week. The highest heat index values are excepted across parts of the Midwest, Ohio Valley and Mid-Atlantic, where they are forecast to be between 105 and 115 degrees through Friday, with locally higher values possible. Excessive Heat Watches, Warnings and Heat Advisories are in effect over much of the central U.S., Ohio Valley and from the Carolinas northward into New England.

NOAA have produced guidance on a range of issues of coping with heat.

In the UK, the Met Office works with the Department of Health and the Welsh Assembly to provide a Heat-Health Watch system across England and Wales from 1 June to 15 September each year.

Heatwaves can be dangerous, especially for the very young, the very old or those with a chronic disease. Prolonged exposure to very high temperatures can mean the body is unable to reduce its own temperature, causing dehydration and heat stroke, which can be fatal. In particular, hot temperatures overnight make it difficult for the body to cool.

The Met Office forecasts day-time and night-time maximum temperatures. These are monitored regionally. When certain heat thresholds are passed, a warning is sent to relevant health professionals and people working in social care, so they can take action to minimise the impact of the heat on the health of people in their area.

Date Created
July 2011

Science and Technology Select Committee to explore Met Office Science

Description

At its meeting on 18 July 2011 the Science and Technology Science Committee agreed to hold an inquiry into Science in the Met Office.

The Committee is focusing on the Met Office Public Weather Service remit and on its science strategy as set out in Met Office science strategy for 2010-2015.

We welcome the Science and Technology Select Committee announcement they are to explore the world-leading science that is undertaken at the Met Office and we look forward to working with them.

Julia Slingo, Met Office Chief Scientist said “I am rightly proud of the science undertaken and technology exploited at the Met Office. Our world renowned science ensures that we are consistently ranked in the top two National Met Services in the world by the WMO and have been recognised as the number one geophysical science research institute in the Times Higher Education Supplement in 2010.”

This study is a great opportunity for the Committee to learn more about our weather and climate science and how it is applied every day for the benefit of the UK, both domestically and overseas. For example, the Met Office provides public weather forecasts and warnings, services for world-wide aviation, support for UK and NATO troops and the provision of climate science to help create resilient communities.

If you want to find out more about our science and scientists then you can explore the full range of our work on our website.

The Role of the Met Office

The PWS remit

The value of the PWS

Science Strategy

Date Created
July 2011

Any truth in St Swithin’s weather folklore?

Description

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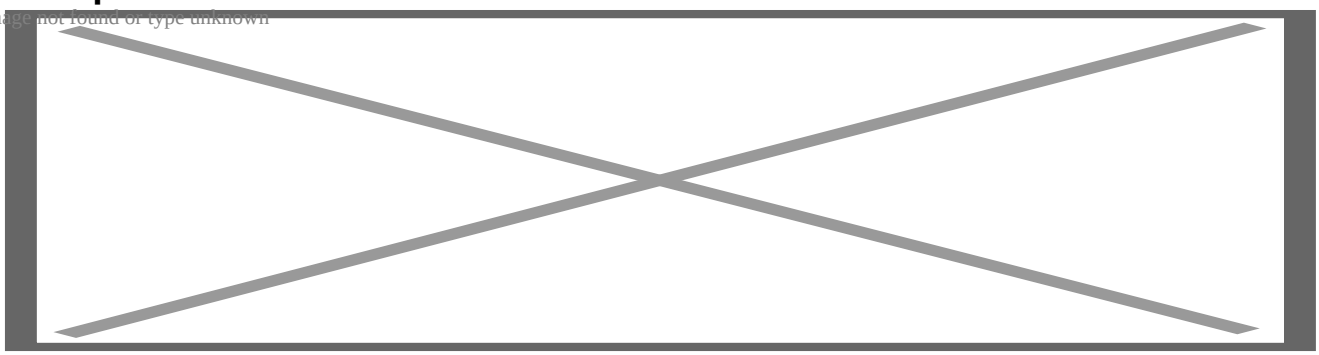

St Swithin’s Day, if it does rain

Full forty days, it will remain

St Swithin’s Day, if it be fair

For forty days, t’will rain no more

So the rhyme goes for St Swithin’s Day on 15 July which must be the most famous piece of weather folklore we have in the UK.

The legend has been around for centuries and is still heeded by many today – but is there any truth behind it?

The history says St Swithin was a monk who died in 862 AD. According to his own request, he was buried in the churchyard of the Old Minster (cathedral) at Winchester in a spot where “the sweet rain from heaven might wet his grave.”

More than a century later he was canonised and his remains were moved inside the cathedral on 15 July. It was said that his spirit was so outraged that it rained for the next forty days.

While the story is compelling, it’s not entirely backed up by historical records and, similarly, when it comes to the weather folklore – it’s not backed up by weather statistics.

Numerous studies have been carried out on past weather observations and none of them have proved the legend true. In fact, since the start of records in 1861, there has neither been 40 dry or 40 wet days following the corresponding weather on St Swithin’s Day.

So despite the forecast of the potential for some rain in many places across the UK this St Swithin’s Day, you should keep up to date with forecasts from the Met Office to really find out what weather may be in store for the next few days and weeks.

And while there have been media reports that we’re heading towards the coolest and wettest summer for 20 years, the truth is it is just too early to say how this summer will compare to others. We still have

2 weeks of July and all of August to go before the end of the summer, and there is still everything to play for.

Date Created
July 2011

Met Office supporting BBC ‘The Great British Weather’ Show

Description

The

Met Office will be behind the scenes of the new BBC magazine show ***‘The Great British Weather’*** which starts tonight on BBC One at 7.30pm.

The Great British Weather is an interactive live series set to tap in to the nation’s obsession with weather, as we find out which clouds mean we should dig out our brollies and where to head for the most sunshine in Britain. It also helps to answer our annoying weather questions, does it really rain cats and dogs – or does it actually rain frogs? Does red sky at night really mean shepherd’s delight? Why are there so many types of clouds and why are they so different?

We have been providing expert scientific and meteorological advice, support and guidance into the making of the show and we’ll have an expert on hand at the Great British Weather HQ to help answer questions during the show tonight.

Through the series there will be a number of features on the work of the Met Office and how we have been forecasting for the nation over the last 150 years or so. This includes providing forecasts for the British armed forces in times on conflict from the D-Day landings through to Afghanistan, services to keep the nation moving and switched on as well as keeping the nation safe and well.

The Met Office’ s own Carol Kirkwood will report on the weather, not from the safety of a BBC Studio – but from 15,000 feet in the air as she paraglides into the heart of an enormous Cumulus cloud. How vast is it? How much does it weigh? What does it taste like? Carol gets her head in the clouds to find out.

Date Created
July 2011

88 degree heatwave or a cool and dull summer? You decide

Description

Despite reports in the media that we are heading toward the coolest and dullest summer for the last 20 years, we here at the Met Office have made no such claim.

The fact of the matter is that it is just too early to say how this summer will compare to others in the record books once the summer is over. We still have 3 weeks of July and all of August to go before the end of summer, and there is still everything to play for.

We have had rather mixed conditions through June and the start of July with some fine warm, and even hot, days and some more unsettled, and very wet days as well. This is typical of summer in the UK when often you get several nice, warm days followed by several unsettled days with heavy showers. We should certainly not be surprised by this type of weather.

For the UK, temperatures for June were actually bang on the long-term average, with sunshine and rainfall both a little above, although very close to what you would normally expect. Currently there are no figures for the UK for July as it is still so early in the month.

As for this summer – well, media reports of a cool and dull summer one week and reports of an 88 degree summer another are one thing, but for the latest forecast you should check out our 16 to 30 day forecast which is updated regularly on our website. Currently it says:

> “Indications are that the weather will remain fairly unsettled across most of the country. Temperatures should be close to normal for many, but perhaps fall a little below across the west of the UK. By contrast, central parts of the country are most favoured for above average temperatures. Rainfall amounts are expected to be a little below normal generally, with eastern parts of England perhaps staying the driest. Sunshine amounts during the same period look to be near-normal for most, but perhaps rising a little above average across the south of the UK.”

Related articles

- ‘Flaming June’ forecasts not from the Met Office (metofficenews.wordpress.com)
- Sunshine and showers? – a challenging forecast (metofficenews.wordpress.com)
- No more hot weather expected (mirror.co.uk)
- Summer ‘coolest since ’91’ (thesun.co.uk)

Date Created
July 2011

Met Office in the Media: 01 July 2011

Description

The Independent has today reported about a partnership between the Met Office and NCAR and other leading climate scientists to investigate exceptional weather events to see whether they can be attributable to global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions. In 'Extreme weather link 'can no longer be ignored'' Steve Connor reports on the Attribution of Climate-related Events (ACE) project which held its first workshop in August 2010 in Colorado.

Peter Stott, Head of Climate Monitoring and Attribution at the Met Office Hadley Centre said: "We've certainly moved beyond the point of saying that we can't say anything about attributing extreme weather events to climate change. It's very clear we're in a changed climate now which means there's more moisture in the atmosphere and the potential for stronger storms and heavier rainfall is clearly there."

More information on this work can be found in:

Climate change: how to play our hand? (Guardian)
Pakistan floods – More than just an active monsoon? (Met Office News Blog)

Elsewhere the Daily Mail and other papers have reported on a research paper that has suggested that aircraft taking off and landing increase the amount of snow or rainfall around airports, where due to the variability in weather is likely to mask any phenomenon within the observations.

Date Created
July 2011